

December 1, 2004

Dear Boston Public Schools Families and Staff,

One year ago, we launched an ambitious public process to review student assignment in the Boston Public Schools. Under the direction of the Student Assignment Task Force, we held community forums in every neighborhood of the city to engage parents and the community in candid conversations about how families choose and are assigned to schools. The Task Force summarized its findings and submitted recommendations to the Superintendent and the School Committee at the beginning of this school year. Since then, the School Committee has held additional public hearings and meetings to review the recommendations and the Superintendent's implementation plan. We are writing to thank you for your participation in this tremendous community engagement effort, and to report on some of the outcomes.

Throughout the city, we heard consistent messages from parents about what is working and not working in the current assignment process, as well as many concrete suggestions for improvement. In particular, families expressed great interest in:

- being able to choose from a variety of high-quality schools;
- making the student registration, "lottery" and assignment process simpler and more understandable;
- increasing access to schools close to home by improving the "walk zone priority" policy;
- expanding Kindergarten opportunities for 4-year-olds; and
- creating additional seats in schools that span Kindergarten through Grade 8.

We are committed to working on behalf of all Boston families to meet these and other goals. Together with our partners and all of the dedicated staff in our schools, we are striving every day to ensure that every student receives a first-rate education and that families have access to educational programs that meet the needs of their children.

As a result of the nearly year-long community engagement process, the School Committee recently approved several important changes to the assignment process and new educational opportunities for students. These will take effect in January 2005, when the registration process for the 2005-2006 school year begins. These improvements represent the first phase of a multi-year plan to deliver many of the changes requested by parents and recommended by the Task Force.

Cross-zone assignments within walk zone: For the first time this year, families may apply to any school within their "walk zone" (one mile for elementary schools, and 1.5 miles for middle schools), including schools located in other assignment zones. We are improving the systems by which families can identify their eligible schools and the schools where they would receive walk zone priority. Families who live within a school's walk zone receive priority for 50 percent of all available seats during the first assignment round – for students applying to Kindergarten and Grades 1, 6 and 9. Also new this year,

walk zone priority (including cross-zone assignments) also will be extended to all Early Education Centers and Early Learning Centers.

**Additional K1 seats:** The School Committee approved 21 additional "Kindergarten 1" classrooms throughout the city, including 4 new Sheltered English Instruction classrooms for English Language Learners. These 462 new seats nearly double the number of opportunities for students who are 4 years old by September 1.

**New small high schools:** With funding from the Gates Foundation, we are continuing to create small high schools that foster strong student-adult relationships and a rigorous academic program to prepare students for college and careers. West Roxbury High School will be reorganized into four small autonomous schools, and Hyde Park High School will be reorganized into three small autonomous schools. This approach has proven successful in transforming the former Dorchester and South Boston High Schools, and we are confident about having a similar impact at these sites. For more information about these new schools, visit [www.highschoolrenewal.org](http://www.highschoolrenewal.org).

**K-8 "feeder" schools:** To create additional opportunities for continuity from elementary to middle school, the School Committee approved an assignment guarantee from two elementary schools to adjacent middle schools. Students leaving Grade 5 at the James Curley Elementary School will be guaranteed assignment at the Mary Curley Middle School, if the parent so chooses. The same is true for students leaving the Dever Elementary School who wish to attend the McCormack Middle School.

Registration for students entering Kindergarten and Grades 1, 6 and 9 will take place from January 10 through February 4, 2005, and for all other grades beginning February 7. Families are encouraged to make informed choices by visiting schools during School Preview Time, now through January 31 ([www.countdowntokindergarten.com](http://www.countdowntokindergarten.com)), and by attending the annual Showcase of Schools (see below). For more information, log on to [www.bostonpublicschools.org](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org) or visit one of the three Family Resource Centers.

**BPS Showcase of Schools:**

Wednesday, January 5, 5:00 to 8:30 p.m.

Campus Center, University of Massachusetts Boston, Morrissey Blvd., Dorchester

directions and map: [www.umb.edu](http://www.umb.edu)

MBTA: red line to JFK, shuttle buses to campus

Please note that last year the School Committee approved new documentation requirements for families to demonstrate Boston residency when applying for schools or submitting a change of address. This policy is designed to ensure that only families who live in the City of Boston have access to educational opportunities in the Boston Public Schools. For more information, visit [www.bostonpublicschools.org/residency](http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/residency).

We are working together to develop additional improvements and expansions for September 2006 and beyond, including:

- adopting a new "lottery" system to simplify the school choice process;

- exploring additional improvements to the walk zone policy;
- converting additional elementary and middle schools into K-8 schools; and
- creating additional Kindergarten seats for 4-year-olds.

We look forward to your continued involvement as we move forward with these and other efforts. Thank you again for your participation in this process and for your commitment to the Boston Public Schools. We wish you and your family a very happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Menino  
Mayor

Elizabeth Reilinger  
School Committee Chair